

"Loftstue"

A Permanent Storage/Living Space

By R.D. Wertz
Lady Sharrah of Starwood

This is my project, in the sense that I've done all the research for it. I already had some building and design experience. My lord was all for the idea—he and (occasionally) another household member have helped with the carpentry. Neither of us is skilled with power tools, but we both collect antique woodworking, carving and (he) blacksmithing tools and enjoy using them.

Background: Tools and Techniques

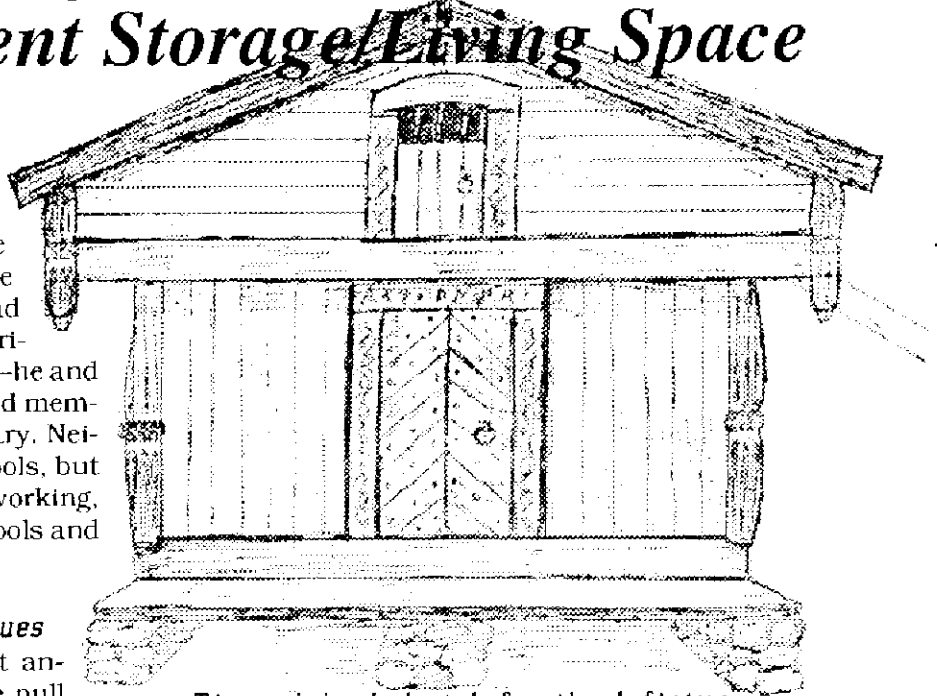
One of our few modern (but ancient design) tools is a Japanese pull saw. I've heard some argument that saws of any kind were unknown to the viking era norsemen, but the fact is they WERE known. The earlier norse structures were primarily of post & plank type, and required both an axe and a saw, not to mention a maul and splitting wedges for the planks.

To construct a temporary structure, an axe in familiar hands was the best tool for the job. Later and permanent structures saw more of the touch of the saw and carving tools for extensive decoration both inside and out. The winters were long and often confining. There was ample time to carve door frame boards, corner & log posts for loft galleries and inside supports.

The Vikings and some later farming norselanders were passionate wood carvers. The woods they had readily available were pine, birch and spruce, although they welcomed new varieties from other places.

Keeping it straight

In Norway, the main house, called a "stue," is where people live and sleep. The "loft" (what we're building) is a two-story storage building for household goods and winter storage. Sometimes, however, the upper story of the loft also was lived in, while the lower story remained a storage room. This was when the building became known as a "loftstue."



The original sketch for the loftstue

Building the Loft: Preliminary research

The original loft was a norse storage building used to hold household treasures and store food. It was roofed with a layer of birch bark (used as we do roof felting today), and covered with sod/turf, wood shingles or boards.

This posed a problem for us. Birch bark was unobtainable. The building area is in the woods where surrounding trees would shade a sod roof and eventually kill the grass. (not to mention the weight problem), and even though boards could be obtained, this area has a severe problem with termites & carpenter ants AND bees.

Many lofts in Norway have had their rooves replaced with metal/tin, so we decided to do that to begin with. The low pitch of the roof also makes this a more practical idea.

Changes seemed inevitable. We needed more light and air circulation, so the one door upstairs was later changed to two, when we decided to make the upper level also a living area.

Constructive Choices

We decided to divide the upper story into two rooms, one for sleeping and the other as a sort of study area. Two doors seemed more practical, because a wall would run down the center length of th upstairs. A wall runs along the center down-

Continued on next page

doors will be somewhat concealed. There will be a sort of stairway/ladder going up to the gallery and carved pine columns supporting it. The pieces are down and debarked and drying.

Historic Landscaping

I've planted six white birch trees out front near the loft and several kinds of medieval strewing herbs around them: tansy, sweet woodruff and penny royal, the first and last being natural insect repellents, the sweet woodruff being a necessary ingredient in "May Wine," a practice that originated in the 13th Century. In Germany, sweet woodruff is known as "waldmeister," master of the forest.

The birch trees are more for atmosphere, but the herbs will be used in the loft and the woodruff surely will make it into next year's May wine.

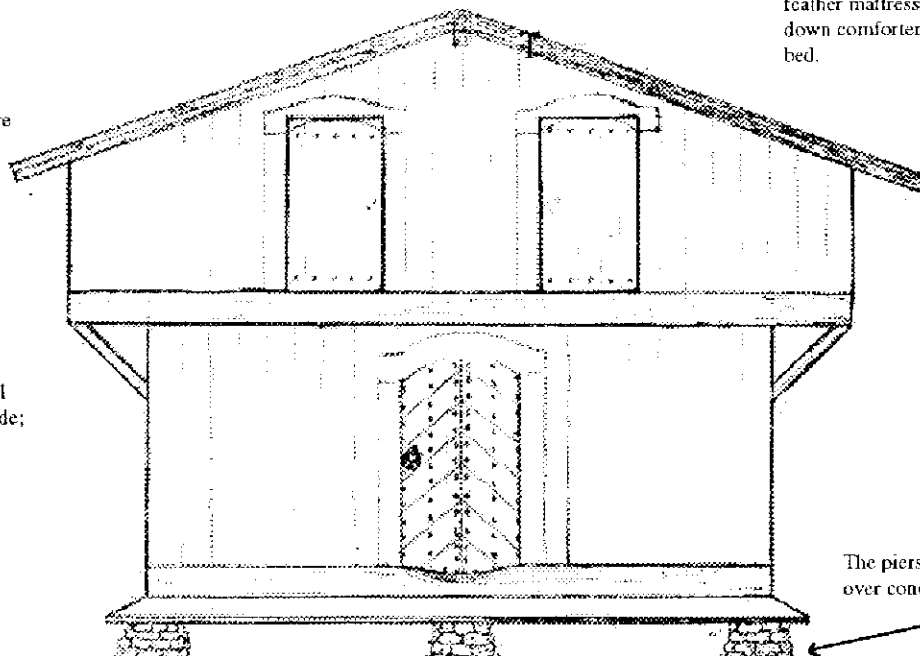
Parting thoughts

Norse building were placed along the sides of hills/mountains, never at the top, because of winds—and not at the bottom, because of the lack of sun and grazing pastures. Wealthier families lived on the sunny sides of mountains (the South side). Alas, we must be poor, because our "mountain" faces north. Considering the reality of living in the sunny South, however, this seems more comfortable.

Craftsmen often had to modify traditional designs so that they could live better in their particular countryside. To construct a dwelling is not an act of building a shelter, but an act of acknowledging the environment's qualities, bringing them close to one's self.

Construction is mainly in pressure treated 4"x4"s & 2"x4"s. The doors are made of 1" x 6" planks and 2"x4"s, held together with 2.25" carriage bolts. The bolts have been roughened to encourage rusting.

The lower porch will be extended to 3' wide; a gallery porch (balcony) will be added upstairs, supported by carved pine columns.



The Loftstue at its current stage of construction

The lower level is for "stuff" storage; The upper will be living quarters--very primitive--a sleeping area on one side. . . no electricity. We'll use oil lamps. There will be a feather mattress and down comforter on a rope bed.

The piers are local field stone over concrete.

When one "belongs" to a landscape in this manner, human existence is meaningful and, as had been earlier posited by Heidegger, one dwells "poetically."

Research Sources

- Almgren, Bertil. *The Viking* (Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordbok, 1975)
- Hard, Roger. *Build Your own Low Cost Log Home* (Vermont: Storey Communications Inc., 1985)
- Hibben, Thomas *The Carpenter's Tool Chest* (J.B. Lippincott Co., 1933)
- Holan, Jerri. *Norwegian Wood*. (New York: Rizzoli International Pub.Co., 1990)
- Magnusson, Magnus *Vikings!* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980)
- Phelps, Herman *The Craft of Log Building* (Ontario, Canada: Lee Valley Tools Ltd., 1982)
- Plath, Iona. *The Decorative Arts of Sweden*. (New York: Dover, 1966)
- Relsal, Harley. *Woodcarving in the Scandinavian Style* (New York, Sterling Pub. Co., 1992)
- Reid, Richard. *The Book of Buildings—The Architecture of Europe*, (London: Michael Joseph Ltd. 1980)
- Simpson, Scot. *Framing & Rough Carpentry*, (Kingston, Mass: R.S. Means & Co. Construction Consultants & Publishers, 1991) A GOOD BEGINNER'S BOOK.
- Sobon, Roger. *Timber Frame Construction*, (Pownal, Vt.: Storey Communications Inc., 1984)
- Stewart, Janice S. *The Folk Arts of Norway*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1972)